

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 07945 101623Z

42

ACTION NEA-16

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8914

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

USINT DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY SANAA

USIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 7945

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT PINS PFOR LE

SUBJ: ABOU JAOUDEH KIDNAPPING

REF: BEIRUT 7826 AND 7758

SUMMARY: KIDNAPPING AND SUBSEQUENT RELEASE OF AN NAHAR
EDITOR AND COLUMNIST MICHEL ABOU JAOUDEH (REFTELS) CREATED
NATIONAL SENSATION OVERSHADOWING ALL OTHER CONCERNS AND
TRIGGERING STRONG POLITICAL AND PUBLIC REACTION AGAINST WHAT MANY
OBSERVERS SAW HERE AS LATEST DRAMATIC EXAMPLE OF BREAKDOWN OF
LAW AND ORDER IN LEBANON. FOR ONCE, HOWEVER, GOL TOOK STRONG
STAND AND WAS ABLE, APPARENTLY IN COOPERATION WITH FEDAYEEN
LEADERSHIP, TO SECURE ABOU JAOUDEH'S RELEASE. ALL GOL OFFICIALS
UNUSUALLY TIGHT-MOUTHED. MOTIVES OF PARTIES BEHIND ABDUCTION REMAIN
UNKNOWN, BUT THEY ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE SIGNIFICANT REGIONAL
DIMENSION. ONE POSSIBLE BENEFIT OF WHOLE AFFAIR IS THAT IT MAY
LEAD TO RECONCILIATION BETWEEN PRES FRANGIE AND NAHAR OWNER
GHASSAN TUENI, WHOSE STERILE FEUDS HAVE RACKED LEBANON FOR SOME
MONTHS. END SUMMARY.

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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 07945 101623Z

1. FIVE-DAY KIDNAPPING OF AN NAHAR'S ABOU JAOUDEH, WHICH ENDED HERE JULY 8 WITH HIS PRE-DAWN RELEASE BY AS-YET-UNKNOWN ABDUCTORS TO GOL INTERNAL SECURITY OFFICIALS AT REMOTE SPOT CLOSE TO LEBANESE-SYRIAN BORDER, STILL HAS BEIRUT AGOG WITH RUMORS ABOUT WHO ABDUCTED HIM, WHY THEY DID IT, AND WHERE THEY TOOK HIM. GOL, EVEN IF IT KNOWS ANSWERS TO THIS MYSTERY, IS KEEPING EXTRAORDINARY TIGHT LID ON WHOLE AFFAIR. LEBANESE OFFICIALS REPORTEDLY HAVE SO FAR ARRESTED ONLY ONE OF FOUR PERSONS INVOLVED IN ACTUAL KIDNAPPING (DRIVER OF VEHICLE) AND ARE STILL SEARCHING FOR THREE OTHERS--DESCRIBED AS INCLUDING BOTH LEBANESE AND PALESTINIANS. ABOU JAOUDEH, IN HIS PUBLIC COMMENTS SINCE JULY 8, HAS SHED LITTLE LIGHT ON MYSTERY, MENTIONING PRIMARILY SUCH DETAILS AS HAVING BEEN MOVED BY HIS CAPTORS IN TRUNK OF SPECIALLY-EQUIPPED AUTOMOBILE AND INTERROGATED BY THEM ON POLITICAL SITUATION IN LEBANON, RECENT ASSASSINATION OF FORMER YEMENI PRIME MINISTER AHMED NU'MAN, AND HIS OWN POLITICAL VIEWS AND WRITINGS.

2. ABOU JAOUDEH'S ABDUCTION EVOKED OUTCRY FROM ALMOST ALL POLITICAL GROUPINGS AND PERSONALITIES IN LEBANON. SINCE REGAINING HIS FREEDOM, HE HAS PRAISED ROLES IN EFFECTING HIS RELEASE PLAYED BY PRESIDENT FRANGIE AND GOL SECURITY OFFICIALS, BY "SOCIALIST" LEADER KAMAL JUMBLATT, AND BY PLO LEADERSHIP--NOTABLY FATAH'S YASSIR 'ARAFAT AND SA'IQA'S ZOHAYR MUHSEN. LOCAL MEDIA AND PUBLIC FIGURES ARE ECHOING THIS PRAISE, WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON EFFUSIVE THANKS TO BOTH PLO AND SYRIAN GOVT FOR THEIR "COOPERATION" IN HELPING GAIN ABOU JAOUDEH'S RELEASE.

3. COMMENT: AS BEST WE CAN DETERMINE, AFTER SIFTING THROUGH UMPTEEN RUMORS AND "INSIDE" STORIES FLOATING AROUND BEIRUT, ABOU JAOUDEH'S KIDNAPPING WAS CARRIED OUT BY PERSONS WHO BECAME KNOWN TO FEDAYEEN MOVEMENT AND ABLE TO FIND SANCTUARY IN NEARBY REFUGEE CAMPS. SEEMS CLEAR THEY WERE ACTING ON BEHALF OF ELEMENTS OF A FOREIGN ARAB GOVT--SYRIA? IRAQ? LIBYA?--WHOSE REASONS FOR WISHING TO ABDUCT ABOU JAOUDEH WILL PROBABLY REMAIN OBSCURE. (ASSUMING AN ARAB GOVT WAS INVOLVED, WE EXPECT GOL WILL BE VERY CAREFUL NOT TO RELEASE FULL DETAILS OF KIDNAPPING OR REVEAL IDENTITY OF ITS SPONSOR IN ORDER AVOID EMBARRASSING INTER-ARAB POLITICAL COMPLICATIONS.)

4. ACTIVE EFFORTS MADE BY LEBANESE AUTHORITIES, INCLUDING
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PAGE 03 BEIRUT 07945 101623Z

PRES FRANGIE HIMSELF, TO SECURE ABOU JAOUDEH'S RELEASE HAVE DONE MUCH TO DISPEL RUMORS OF GOL RESPONSIBILITY FOR HIS KIDNAPPING. (SUCH RUMORS FOR A TIME APPEARED VALID TO MANY LEBANESE IN VIEW OF PETTY BUT VICIOUS FEUDING WHICH HAS EXISTED BETWEEN GOL AND NAHAR OWNER GHASSAN TUENI FOR MANY MONTHS--SEE SEPTEL.) IF NO OTHER GOOD COMES OF THIS WHOLE AFFAIR OTHER THAN POSSIBLY BRINGING ABOUT RAPPROACHMENT BETWEEN PRES FRANGIE AND TUENI, THAT WILL BE WELCOME ENOUGH.

GODLEY

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